

Christian Taylor

by Sieg Lindstrom

Would that a “down year” for any of us was only a dip like Christian Taylor’s ‘13 season. The reigning World/Olympic triple jump champ managed “just” 4th in Moscow, but he still won the Diamond League and World Ranked No. 2.

Born in Georgia to Barbadian parents, Taylor hit a hot streak on the jumps runway—and track—almost from the moment he set soccer aside, figuring he’d grown too tall for it, early in high school. His soph season saw Taylor try summer competition for the first time; the next year (’07) he won the World Youth crown.

At Florida, four NCAA titles followed and in the summer of ‘11 Taylor, already a world champion, the all-time fifth-longest jumper and the youngest man ever to 3-bounce so far, turned pro and set his sights successfully on Olympic hardware.

After his London triumph, Taylor followed mentor Rana Reider to Loughborough, England, when Reider took a coaching job with Britain’s national team.

Taylor’s girlfriend, Olympics-aspiring volleyball player Kelly Murphy who plays professionally in Italy, provides a sounding board, mostly over Skype, for the trading of cultural adjustment stories.

T&FN, too, took to a digital connection to ask Taylor what’s on tap for this year.

T&FN: How’s life treating you over in England?

Taylor: It’s pretty cool. Training’s going well; just training, that’s all.

T&FN: You’re obviously not competing indoors this year.

Taylor: Yeah. I’m really trying to focus on some 400s this year and I’m going to open up at Florida Relays, actually, but I’d like to qualify for USA’s in the 400 and just try something new because it’s kind of an off year. So I figured, “Why not dust some of that dust off and go have some fun?”

T&FN: Exploring a different event will probably recharge your batteries somewhat.

Taylor: Yeah, exactly. It presents some new challenges, and it’s been a little rollercoaster the last three years: straight shot out with some quick success and then a little disap-

pointment in Moscow so it’s kind of a step away. I’m done beating myself up and the whole mentality is to just go out there, have some fun and find the old Christian again.

T&FN: Will you long and triple jump as well?

Taylor: My first couple meets will be 400s and I’ve spoken to the Drake Relays director and based off that will determine if that gets me into the Drake [400].

So there’s definitely some meets where I’m going to be running 400s but also outside of that I have to get the total Diamond League triple jump win because they IAAF has that rule where you get a bye into the next World Championships if you win that.

It is going to be important for me to get that bye since I didn’t win in Moscow. That will help me reestablish myself and get back on the triple jump.

T&FN: If things go well in the 400—and we’re not forgetting you ran 45.34 as a frosh at Florida—would you consider vying for a spot on the U.S. 4x4 at the new World Relays in May?

Taylor: Absolutely. I really think that after the U.S. got 2nd behind the Bahamas at the Olympics, that really kind of opened the window for other people to get on that relay. I think there’s the possibility that they could use a leg or could be looking for an alternate.

For me, I know what I need to run; hitting a standard is important, but being consistent is also important. They want to

know that somebody can do the rounds or could be the final guy, whatever they need. It’s something I think would be really cool and who doesn’t want to go to the Bahamas?

T&FN: How will running the 400 change up your training compared to the past 3 years?

Taylor: I definitely have been running a lot more. Before I would be jumping 2 or 3 times a week, whether it was long or triple. There’s that constant

Taylor In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Christian Devere Taylor was born June 18, 1990, in Fayetteville, Georgia; 6-2/175 (1.88/80)

•**PRs:** 100—10.61 (’12); 200—20.70 (’13); 400—45.34 (’09); LJ—26-10½/8.19 (’10); TJ—58-11¼/17.96 (’11) (5, x W; 3, 4 A)

•**Schools:** Sandy Creek (Tyronne, Georgia) HS ’08; Florida ’12; now represents Li Na

•**Coaches:** Eric Bowen (Sandy Creek); Mike Holloway & Dick Booth (Florida); Rana Reider (professional)

•**Major Meets:** LJ—3)WY ’07; 3)USJ, 7)WJ ’08; 6)NCi ’09; 2)NCi, 4)NC, 12)US ’10; 10)NC, 4)US ’11; 4)OT ’12; 6)US ’13

TJ—4)USJ, 1)WY ’07; 2)USJ, 8)WJ ’08; 1)NCi, 3)NC ’09; 1)NCi, 1)NC, 2)US ’10; 2)NCi, 1)NC, 1)US, 1)WC ’11; 2)USi, 2)WCi, 1)OT, 1)OG ’12; 4)WC ’13

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** LJ—x, 6 ’10; x, 7 ’11; x, 5 ’12; x, 8 ’13; TJ—x, 4 ’09; x, 1 ’10; 1, 1 ’11; 1, 1 ’12; 2, 1 ’13



KEVIN MORRIS



“I’m done beating myself up and the whole mentality is to just go out there, have some fun and find the old Christian again”

bouncing, constant finding that rhythm and then doing a little indoor. Even when I did the indoor season, I was only doing 3 or 4 meets anyway; the indoor season’s so short it’s just really hard to find that rhythm.

Now it’s a lot of running. I have a lot of 100/200 guys to work with and also solid 4-8 guys who train in the group also.

T&FN: Last year you said the move to England had made you stronger. How?

Taylor: Now that my coach has the opportunity and has come over here, it’s definitely been a mental strain because it does snow here—quite frequently and for much of the year. I think adjusting to that since I’ve never really dealt with it before has really been a mental test.

I try to find the positives, and the advantage is that when I go to meets now if it’s 50 or 60 degrees and people are bundled up and so focused on it being cold rather than the task at hand, for me now that’s what I train in.

I think it’s definitely put me ahead of the mindset that I used to have but it was definitely a learning curve at the beginning.

T&FN: Culturally, what’s it been like to be in a small town the British Midlands?

Taylor: There are a lot of different culture changes. Trackwise, I think the mentality is different. I find that the GB Team has more of a team feel. They do a lot of team meetings and team trainings and there’s so much that goes on.

When they get to the championships you’re not meeting new people because you would have seen them all at a relay camp or the like.

The USA may have a relay camp before a championships. These guys are having warm-weather training in January, warm-weather training in March/April, relay training in June.

You’re constantly seeing that person, you’re constantly building that chemistry. I thought that was pretty neat; it’s just a different perspective. It’s something that I

don’t know the U.S. can do because so many people are coming from the college system. It’s not the same and obviously the U.S. is much bigger as a whole, so it would be a lot more difficult to do.

Outside track, there was definitely a big food adjustment. They’re not big on spices over here. It’s a little more plain; they’re big on potatoes, fish & chips, things like that.

Me, being from where I used to live, it’s not the metro, it’s very farmlike. There’s the market every week and the butchers will come out and put their livestock out. It’s definitely been a big cultural change from living in a college town and having burgers right around the corner, or the kinds of things you would find in any kind of U.S. college town.

T&FN: Do you live at the training center?

Taylor: I have my own apartment. It’s near the town center because outside of that it’s literally just farms. I don’t drive. The driving’s on the other side of the road so I didn’t even try to take up that challenge.

I just longboard to practice every day if it’s not snowing and just get it done. I’m probably about a mile from the track.

T&FN: You skateboard to practice?

Taylor: Yeah. It’s something I just picked up when I was at Florida to get around campus. It kind of stuck with me. It drives my coach nuts but it’s kind of like my piece of home.

T&FN: You’ve said you’re a Gator for life. At Florida you had incredible training partners in Will Claye and Omar Craddock. Is there camaraderie for a Yank in Loughborough?

Taylor: It’s good because there are no other triple jumpers in the group. Obviously there’s not that competitive thing, which is good and bad. [Long jumper] Shara Proctor is here too, though, and she went to Florida with me.

It’s kind of cool because we can still reflect on those days, but from the first day I joined the group everyone was very warm. The team is a bunch of guys and girls who do the same thing: make whatever team is up next. The goal is all the same.

T&FN: You’ve had phenomenal success almost every year. Last year was a little bit down with your 4th-place finish in Moscow. What was up?

Taylor: Hmm. I think my mind just wasn’t where it needed to be. I did have the move and there were a lot of things that were on my mind I allowed to get the best of me. I’m not really one to make excuses; I’m someone who can take a loss and learn from it.

The thing I’ve told myself and my coach, and even my training partners, is that I was so successful at the beginning and the fire was burning strong but it wasn’t something I was just talking about. I was also walking that walk.

The thing is when I went to Moscow I wanted to win and I needed to find that urgency or that need to win. It’s kind of just a matter of getting my head where it needs to be again. I don’t want to forget the titles—because they’re important and something I’m very proud of—but if I’m thinking about that time I’ll never be able to move forward.

I play golf and it’s the same mindset I take there. If you’re thinking about the hole before

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Taylor — continued

where you missed a stroke you'll never be able to hit the ball. You have to hit it and be done with it and prepare for the next shot.

T&FN: Are you trying anything new and different with your technique here in the off year?

Taylor: I'm actually making a big change. I'm switching my takeoff leg. That's going to surprise some people. I tried it in Brussels at the last Diamond League of last year and went 16.89 [55-5] off of it.

I actually surprised myself. The commentators were surprised that I was so happy with that distance but they didn't realize that was the first time I'd jumped off the opposite leg.

My coach and I looked at some film and we've seen that the other leg was doing things that could actually take me farther. Why not go for that?

If there's a 1% chance that it could happen, we're jumpers, we work in centimeters. It doesn't take feet to get to that World Record. I don't take "I'm willing to do whatever it takes" as a joke. I don't take that lightly.

When I talked to my coach and he heard it he was supportive but he also asked, "Do you really want to risk that?"

The thing is if it takes getting used to, if it takes a little time to build up to, I'm going to do it for the long-run goal.

T&FN: Did you try it in Brussels with a full approach?

Taylor: Yup. I literally just winged it. If you see the videos you will definitely see that it was not a comfortable thing. When you're jumping you just have to go for it, and the thing is I would run-run-run and when I came to the board every time I would say, "What am I doing?"

You can't hesitate and that was costing me. I'm not saying every jump was 16.89. The first one was 16.40 [53-9¾] but then once I realized I could do it I said, "Let me go for a little more," and obviously it increased.

Now I have to go with the mindset that it's not my opposite leg; I didn't switch legs, it's just jumping.

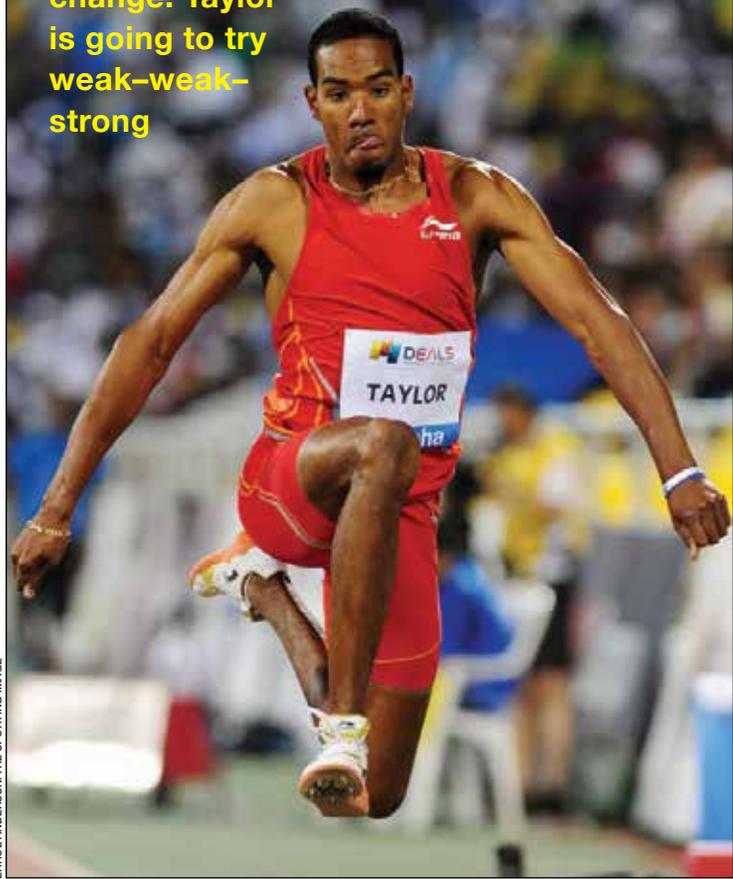
I kind of think I have gotten over the barrier of the fact that I have switched, and to be honest that's kind of the reason that I didn't do indoors, because I didn't think it was worth messing up the training and messing up the transition that we're doing right now.

T&FN: So what's your pattern now?

Taylor: I jump right-right-left. Before I was doing left-left-right. My last leg was what they would call the weak leg but now I'm doing right-right-left and my last leg would actually be my long jump leg.

I was doing long jump-long jump, the powerful leg, and then using whatever I have

Major technique change: Taylor is going to try weak-weak-strong



ERROL ANDERSON/THE SPORTING IMAGE

left on the last jump. Now I'm going to save that last big long jump for the long jump phase.

T&FN: You've certainly watched video of Jonathan Edwards' World Record (60-¼/18.29) and his other big jump (59-7/18.16) at the '95 World Championships—even though you were 5 at the time. He looked like a stone skipping on water. Is that what you aim for?

Taylor: Yes, as close as possible. Obviously what he did is truly one of a kind. It's almost mesmerizing when you see it. The first time I saw it I thought, "That's impossible." It looks just unreal for somebody so skinny to be so springy, so quick. It just looks so easy.

It's almost something I watch almost on a daily basis. That's what you want to strive for and then be able to see how you can put a twist to go past that mark.

It's just such an amazing feat and I have just so much respect for the man and the performance, but it's something I think I've found a new hunger for. It's something that needs to be broken. It's been over 20 years now. □